Is 'Epistemology Naturalized' Really Epistemology?

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Introduction

Epistemology has generally been regarded as the study of foundations or the foundations of knowledge itself. From a Naturalist's point of view, epistemology is concerned with foundations of science. Although not all agree, some philosophers believe that this concern has ultimately been reduced to an enquiry into logic itself and set theory.[1] According to the philosopher W.V. Quine, all these attempts have failed to produce an adequate theory for the justification of knowledge. If this is true, what is left for epistemology? Quine believes that what is left for epistemology is for it to be naturalized. In this essay, I will attempt to discuss what Quine's vision of epistemology naturalized is and what his arguments are for such a project. I will compare the traditional epistemological project to Quine's naturalized epistemology in order to clarify Quine's proposal. Next, I will discuss Quine's naturalized epistemology and how it proposes to study human knowledge and whether it has room for the normative. Finally, I will consider Stroud's arguments from skepticism in light of Quine's theory to see if Quine's own proposal is inconsistent in any way or incapable of being carried out under the banner of epistemology.

I. Quine's Argument

In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" Quine gives us a clear idea of what his epistemological view seems to be. His idea is that "the totality of our so-called

[1] W.V. Quine "Epistemology Naturalized," 292.

knowledge or beliefs… is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges."[2] This "fabric" or "web" of beliefs, according to Quine, are continually being revised in order to keep the edge of our conceptual scheme "squared with experience."[3] Furthermore, Quine understands conceptual schemes as the tools of science, tools for predicting future experiences. Within any given conceptual scheme certain entities, which could be considered myths, can be posited for the purposes of "working a manageable structure into the flux of experience."[4]

Another important move for Quine in working out his naturalized epistemology is his rejection of reductionism. Quine points out that within epistemology, or the epistemological program, two divisions have been made - divisions into the 'conceptual' (concerning meaning) and the 'doctrinal' (concerning truth). What is Quine's understanding of these two divisions? Quine states: "The conceptual studies are concerned with clarifying concepts by defining them, some in terms of others. The doctrinal studies are concerned with establishing laws by proving them, some on the basis of others."[5] So how does this relate to reductionism? The answer is the program is really divided into to projects: a *conceptual reduction* project and a *doctrinal reduction* project. Quine mentions the various philosophers who have attempted this and failed. Of these various philosophers Quine declares: "It was Carnap, in his *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* of 1928, who came nearest to executing it."[6] However, it is important to note that Quine rejects Carnap's reductionism.[7] This rejection is made explicitly in *Two Dogmas of Empiricism.* The

[2] Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," 42.
[3] Ibid., 44.
[4] Ibid.
[5] EN, 292.
[6] EN, 294.
[7] Jaegwon Kim states: "Because the holistic manner in which empirical meaning is generated by experience, no reduction of the sort Carnap and others so eagerly sought could in principle be completed. For definitional reduction requires point-to-point meaning relations between physical terms

dogma of reductionism that Quine denies is the idea that with each statement there can be "associated a unique range of possible sensory events such that the occurrence of any of them would add to the likelihood of truth of the statement."[8] Quine rejects such an conceptual interpretation and replaces it with the idea "that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body."[9] In other words, statements only have meaning within the greater "fabric" or "web" of beliefs and language structures. This is Quine's conceptual program clearly stated.

According to Quine, the doctrinal project is in worse shape than the conceptual side of epistemology. As Barry Stroud puts it, the doctrinal question is concerned with "whether our knowledge of external physical things can be adequately justified on the basis of purely 'sensory' knowledge."[10] However, the idea that one could validate science as true by deducing it from empirical sensory experiences appears to be impossible.[11] For Quine, Hume adequately showed this by providing his problem of induction. This establishes, as Robert Fogelin puts it, why Quine rejects the doctrinal demand that epistemology should provide justification of empirical knowledge. In other words, it's because "Quine was simply an unapologetic Humean"[12] that he rejected the doctrinal project of validating science from sense data. If we abandon the traditional doctrinal project and give up the idea that philosophy's claims to knowledge are more secure than that of science, then what is to be said for the future of epistemology? Quine's answer is that the

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and phenomenal terms, something that Quine's holism tells us cannot be had." ("What is 'Naturalized Epistemology?'" 303)

[8] TDE, 40.

[9] Ibid., 41.

[10] Stroud, "Naturalized Epistemology," 222.

[11] "So it is agreed on all hands that the classical epistemological project, conceived as one of deductively validating physical knowledge from indubitable sensory data, cannot succeed." (Jaegwon Kim, "What is 'Naturalized Epistemology?'" 304)

[12] Robert Fogelin, "Aspects of Quine's Naturalized Epistemology," 24.

epistemological burden should be handed over to psychology. This is the project – "epistemology naturalized." Quine states:

> Such a surrender of the epistemological burden to psychology is a move that was disallowed in earlier times as circular reasoning. If the epistemologist's goal is validation of the grounds of empirical science, he defeats his purpose by using psychology or other empirical science in the validation. However, such scruples against circularity have little point once we have stopped dreaming of deducing science from observations. If we are out simply to understand the link between observations and science, we are well advised to use any available information, including that provided by the very science whose link with observation we are seeking to understand. [13]

Quine's point is that since the traditional epistemological project (justification-centered epistemology) has failed, one should set aside this project and settle with what is available, that is, observations and science (theory).[14] Furthermore, Quine appears to get around the difficulty of circularity by simply stating that he is not concerned with validating science, but merely understanding science and how it relates to observation. It would only be circular if one used science to validate science. However, this would be to return to the old idea of justification-centered epistemology, which Quine clearly thinks is not possible. Since it appears impossible to validate science from empirical observation, it would be "better to discover how science is in fact developed and learned than to fabricate a fictitious structure to a similar effect."[15] Hence, Quine's project, epistemology naturalized, can be understood as being factual or descriptive rather than justificatory.[16]

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[13] EN, 294.

[14] "If we accept, following Quine, that analyticity and related notions do not illuminate the notion of logical truth, and if we accept Quine's claim that the sentences of a theory face the tribunal of experience together and not individually, then science self-applied yields the deepest understanding of our beliefs. For what better justification can we hope to have for our beliefs, jointly shared or individually held? There is no *evaluating* our theory from without, so we must try to account for it from within, using the resources it offers." (Paul Roth, "Siegel on Naturalized Epistemology and Natural Science," 491-492)

[15] EN, 295.

[16] "We are given to understand that in contrast traditional epistemology is not a descriptive, factual inquiry. Rather, it is an attempt at a 'validation' or 'rational reconstruction' of science. Validation, according to Quine, proceeds via deduction, and rational reconstruction via definition." (Kim, 305)

II. Traditional Epistemology vs. Naturalized Epistemology

It may be helpful at this point to return to a distinction made earlier between the traditional epistemological project and what Quine proposes. An example will help to make this distinction more evident. Suppose person S is asked why he thinks object X to be a triangle. Furthermore, suppose S responds: "Because it is a three sided figure." However, the objection would be that this is simply stating the meaning of X; it does not explain why he thinks this object to be a triangle. Showing that one could substitute equivalent words for others is not the same as showing why one thinks X is a triangle. What we are looking for when we ask why does S think object X is a triangle is the justification for that belief. In other words, we are looking for the criteria by which person S determines object X to be a triangle. Such an inquiry usually falls under the idea of traditional epistemology.

Quine's view, on the other hand, is that either epistemology is a sort of vantage point from outside our world or it is a project within the world. Since Quine denies that there is any cosmic exile having knowledge of the world from outside, he reasons that the only possible option is scientific epistemology - a naturalized project from within the world. Therefore, according to Quine, epistemology itself should be handled like any other phenomena in the world. It should be studied and described scientifically and empirically. Stroud observes Quine's approach and states:

> [E]pistemology or the theory of knowledge is nothing more than the study of what knowledge is and how it comes to be. And for Quine there is no reason to suppose that the study of human knowledge or language or thought requires a fundamentally different sort of investigation from the study of physics or animal behaviour or mathematics. All attempts to find out about ourselves and the world must be made from within the conceptual and scientific resources we have already developed for finding out about anything.[17]

[17] Stroud, 211.

Knowledge itself is a natural phenomenon, which means it should be studied by the natural sciences, as an empirical study of how knowledge is possible. It is put quite nicely by Kim when he states: "Epistemology is to go out of the business of justification."[18] Since there is no future for epistemology in justification, Quine argues: "Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as chapter of psychology and hence of natural science."[19] This is the Quinean proposal that was touched on earlier, the proposal that surrenders the epistemological burden over to psychology. Quine explains that the old epistemological project hoped to contain natural science, whereas his proposal suggests that it is to be contained in natural science as a 'chapter of psychology.'

At this point one may wonder how psychology would attempt to study human knowledge. In what way should the empirical study of knowledge fit in among the rest of the natural sciences? Since, according to naturalism, nature operates through the laws of mechanics (physics) and events are connected to one another by antecedent states, it appears that everything in nature is dependent on these antecedent states and determined by the laws of mechanics. Because there is nothing over and above nature for the naturalist, knowledge must be part of nature. Therefore, it follows that knowledge must be determined by antecedent causes and accounted for by the laws of mechanics. This is one reason to see why Quine would be justified (no pun intended) in treating epistemology within science itself, as a chapter of psychology. To treat epistemology within science itself, Quine proposes that we throw out the old concept that epistemology should belong to traditional metaphysics. For the naturalist there is nothing more than nature herself; thus, traditional

[18] Kim, 305.
[19] Quine, EN, 296.

metaphysics (considered as a separate discipline from science) is to be viewed as an illegitimate inquiry. The naturalist's motto is "there is no first philosophy and philosophy should be seen to be continuous with science." Quine refers to Neurath's example of the philosopher and scientist being on the same boat, whereby they must rebuild their ship according to what is available to them on the ship. The point is that there is no 'external position' from which one could rebuild theory. One must always proceed to formulate theories from within the ship, according to what is already known.[20] Hence, for Quine and other naturalists, psychology becomes the legitimate science for studying reason and knowledge.

As was pointed out earlier, the study of knowledge must entail a study of antecedent events in accordance with the laws of mechanics. This is exactly what Quine proposes. He suggests that one can study the "natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject," whereby "this human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input – certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance – and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history."[21] He goes on to say that what prompts us to study this relation between input and output is similar to what prompts us to study epistemology, that is, "to see how evidence relates to theory."[22] Before moving on let me state Quine's argument clearly.

<u>Quine's Argument Summarized</u>

1. Either there is 'first philosophy' and one can validate physical knowledge from sensory data or one cannot. [One cannot]

[20] "There is no special detached position from which a philosopher might conduct such inquiries… Hypotheses and theories are evaluated and accepted or rejected in light of what is already know or can somehow be discovered. Scientists, then, are like sailors who must repair or rebuild their ship while staying afloat on it in the open sea. There is no dry-dock in which they can lay a new keel and start again from new foundations; nor can they simply abandon ship and choose another of more efficient design. There is no other." (Stroud, 212)
[21] EN, 297.
[22] Ibid.

2. Since one cannot, the only other available option is using what we have, that is, science.
3. Thinking it is circular to appeal to science without deducing science first (presupposing science to be valid without proving science to be valid), can be avoided by simply removing the idea of deducing science from observation.
4. One can allow for skepticism within science while avoiding circularity objections by letting the skeptic proceed by way of a *reductio ad Absurdum*. In other words, science is either true or it is not. Suppose it is true and that this supposition leads to an absurdity. If this happens, then one can legitimately abandon the scientific method and seek a new method without being accused of begging the question.[23]
5. The answer to skepticism is that since we have nothing other than science to go by, it would be by means of science that one would disprove science or raise skeptical objections.[24]
6. Reasons to accept science: a) what else is there? b) its methods work. c) any question to abandon science will always arise within science itself.

III. Epistemology Naturalized and the Study of Knowledge

Returning to the previous conversation, we see how knowledge can be studied by understanding its antecedent causes and relating that to what Quine calls the torrential output. This seems to be consistent with naturalism's claim that anything that can be understood will be understood according to antecedent events under the laws of physics. However, the objection to this is, if our knowledge is caused, is it really knowledge? It certainly can be the case that *x* causes me to believe *y* at time *t* and it just so happens that *y* is true, but is it the case that I have knowledge that y is true at time *t*? Suppose that a wicked brain-surgeon *x* artificially induces belief *y* in me, which just so happen to be false. I would then have *x* causing me to believe *y* at time *t* while *y* is false. Since the brain-surgeon could of equally caused me to believe something true, the question immediately arises, how would I know *y* is true at time *t* if my knowledge is caused by *x*? If Quine is right, then epistemology can simply be understood as the study of the sensory impacts (the causes) and their given relation to

[23] "I am not accusing the sceptic of begging the question; he is quite within his rights in assuming science in order to refute science; this, if carried out, would be a straightforward argument by *reductio ad absurdum*, I am only making the point that sceptical doubts are scientific doubts." (Quine, "The Nature of Natural Knowledge, 68)

[24] Stroud comments on Quine's answer to skepticism by stating: "scientific knowledge can be used in meeting that challenge precisely because the challenge arises within science itself." (Stroud, 226)

the torrential output (one's beliefs). Taking Quine's naturalized epistemology as a legitimate project, one can explain why a person believes *y* at time *t.* Isn't this enough for epistemology? Isn't it enough if we abandon the idea that epistemology could ever be foundational in the way Descartes envisioned it? Stroud thinks that this is not enough. Even if one could explain why and how a person comes to believe *y* at time *t*, and it just so happens that *y* is in fact true, one's explanation, on Quine's view, could never account for how that person comes to have a true belief.[25] The reason why is: "That it is possible for someone to have a true belief and yet lack knowledge – it might have been a coincidence or a lucky guess or a belief held for reasons unconnected with the truth of what is believed."[26] Stroud gives a good example to demonstrate this point. He states there is someone who believes that there are exactly one thousand four hundred and seventeen beans in a certain jar. Furthermore, he asks us to suppose that there just so happens to be that many beans in the jar. It might occur to someone that this certain person counted the beans and that is why he knows exactly how many there are in that jar. However, Stroud informs us that this individual never counted the beans, never saw them being put into the jar, nor did anyone connected with putting them in the jar tell him how many beans there were. Despite all this, Stroud's person in his example has become convinced that there are exactly that many beans in the jar. Stroud's point is that given these two explanations, namely, the explanation of the person's belief and the explanation of the number of beans in the jar, this would not count as an explanation for how that person got a true belief right. He states: "simply accepting both explanations does not provide me with an intelligible connection between the truth of the belief and its being

[25] Stroud, 237.
[26] Ibid.

a belief of his."[27] However, an objection on Quine's behalf could be made by stating that this is a case for justified knowledge and not knowledge simply.

Alvin Goldman argues that it is possible to have knowledge while not necessarily being justified. Suppose I think that the best example of justification is found in direct justification, whereby I have access to my own mental states. Therefore, using Chrisholm's terminology, "*self-presenting,*" I could say that I certainly have justified knowledge of "self-presenting" statements like "I am thinking." This seems to be somewhat reminiscent of Descartes own thought experiments, whereby he concluded that an evil demon, or in this case evil brain-surgeon, could never artificially cause a false belief in him that he was thinking. Accepting, for the sake of the argument, that self-presenting is an example of justification, I can give the following definition that Goldman delivers in his essay:

> If *p* is a self-presenting proposition, and *p* is true for S at *t*, and S believes *p* at *t*, then S's belief in *p* at *t* is justified.

Goldman gives this definition a nomological reading and revises it to say: "that a proposition is self-presenting just in case it is nomologically necessary that if *p* is true for S at *t*, then S believes *p* at *t*."[28] Goldman points out that this is not necessarily a correct definition, because we can think of case where the antecedent of this definition is satisfied, but we would not have a true justified belief. His example proceeds as follows: Suppose that *p* stands for "I am in brain-state B" and that "I am in brain-state B" is realized whenever S is in brain-state B. According to the definition given, such a belief is always justified. Now imagine person S is under surgery and our brain-surgeon artificially causes brain-state B in S so that S now believes that he is in brain-

[27] Stroud, 238.
[28] Goldman, "*What is Justified Belief?*" 343.

state B. We would certainly say that S has knowledge that he is in brain-state B, but I doubt that we would say that what he knows is justified in any sense.[29]

So how does this relate to Quine's project of naturalized epistemology? The examples, provided by Stroud and Goldman, are to show that one could study the causal antecedents (the inputs), with regard to the human subject, and observe its relation to the torrential output, while failing to provide any insight into knowledge or justified belief. Each of the following cases provide examples of some antecedent cause and a corresponding torrential output that can be understood as a belief. However, given Quine's naturalized epistemological project, now seen as psychology, what would constitute as knowledge in the mere observation of sensory inputs and torrential outputs? Recalling the examples given earlier, we can be summarize them into the following cases:

Case 1:	Conclusion:
X (evil brain surgeon) causes S to believe something false.	There is no knowledge, no true belief, and no justification.
Case 2:	Conclusion:
X causes S to believe that are one thousand four hundred and seventeen beans in a certain jar. [30]	There is true belief, but no knowledge, and certainly no justification.
Case 3:	Conclusion:
X (the brain surgeon) artificially causes S to believe a self-presenting proposition which is true.	There is knowledge and true belief, but there is no justification.

Again, how can psychology ever make any of the conclusions just given once the idea of justification is thrown out and replaced with observation? As Paul Roth states:

[29] Ibid.
[30] X here is not the evil brain surgeon, but some other antecedent cause.

"Psychology studies the chain of associations peculiar to specific individuals; epistemology studies those structures recognized by the relevant community of reasoners to have 'justificatory force'."[31] The difficulty is that Quine's naturalized epistemology has no room for things like 'justificatory force.' Is Quine, as Harvey Siegel suggests, confusing the processes by which a scientific discovery is made with that by which the method of scientific discovery is justified? Siegel states:

> [P]sychological information can never by itself give us good reason for accepting some particular knowledge-claim as true, and since this is our criterion of adequacy for epistemologically justificatory claims, it follows that no psychological claim can be an epistemologically justificatory claim. Which is to say, psychology cannot be relevant to epistemology.[32]

By throwing out the idea of justification, it seems that one also throws out the normative as well, simply for the reason that the very idea of justification is normative. Since Quine's naturalized epistemology has no space for the normative, why should it be called epistemology at all? In attempting to answer this question, it will be helpful to understand skepticism and its relation to Quine's project.

IV. Skepticism and Quine's Naturalized Epistemology

In this section, I will examine how Quine's naturalized epistemology attempts to handle the problem of skepticism. Several skeptical problems will be considered. The first problem has to do with Quine's assertion that theories are underdetermined by empirical data, meaning that any available evidence is always compatible with a plurality of competing theories. Given the plurality of competing theories, all of which fit the available evidence, how can any of the theories explain how we know

[31] Paul Roth, 484.
[32] Siegel 1980, 315.

there are external objects? Furthermore, why should we think that the physical theory is a correct theory regarding the external world?

Second, how does Quine's project propose to deal with, say Descartes problem of the evil demon causing our supposed knowledge of sensory data? How does Quine propose to deal with what is also known as the 'traditional problem'? Stroud argues that nowhere in Quine's theory does he deal with the 'traditional problem,' nor does he discuss how his project could ever eliminate the possibility that our sense data was merely the product of Descartes' evil demon.[33] It is important to note, as does Hookway, that no one really believes that all is an illusion or a mere dream. These thought experiments and their responses simply serve to clarify the very nature of truth and justification.[34]

Nevertheless, why should Quine seek to justify our knowledge of the physical world or attempt to eliminate the possibility of an evil demon producing illusions within us? This is simply to return to the 'doctrinal' issue of attempting to justify our knowledge of physical bodies in purely sensory terms, something Quine has abandoned entirely.[35] Besides, Quine thinks, "illusions are illusions only relative to a prior acceptance of genuine bodies with which to contrast them," and "bodies have to be posited before there can be a motive, however tenuous, for acquiescing in a noncommittal world of the immediate given."[36] This suggests that since some knowledge is needed to even identify illusions, it cannot be the case that illusions stand to undermine "all of our scientific knowledge all at once." (Stroud, 227) In this sense, the epistemological skeptic would seem to contradict himself simply for the

[33] Stroud, 221.
[34] "No one considers it a serious possibility that all is a dream. But responding to these sceptical challenges clarifies the nature of truth and justification." (Hookway, "Nature and Experience," 186)
[35] "The justified elimination of possibilities incompatible with knowledge of the physical world is precisely what was is question in the traditional problem." (Stroud, 221)
[36] NNK, 67.

reason that he assumed scientific knowledge in attempting to refute all of scientific knowledge at once. Still, Quine does not think that this leads the skeptic to an outright contradiction.[37] He believes that these 'skeptical doubts are scientific doubts' and that the epistemologist is 'clearly free' to use whatever is available in science to answer them. Stroud, in responding to Quine's peculiar assertion, asks if there is nothing self-defeating (according to Quine) about beginning with scientific knowledge and ending up rejecting it all, "what becomes of 'the crucial logical point' that the traditional epistemologist is said to have missed?"[38] Quine appears to reason that since skeptical doubts are scientific doubts, epistemology must belong to the natural sciences and in view of this fact, the epistemologist is free to use any or all of scientific theory. Quine, as we have seen, suggests that the skeptic is allowed to use science to refute science and that his argument would proceed by *reductio ad absurdum*.[39] However, Stroud believes even if it is granted that the skeptic may be arguing by way of *reductio*, it does not follow that epistemology is a part of natural science. Nor does it follow that if 'skeptical doubts are scientific doubts,' the epistemologist would be in a better position to freely use any or all of "scientific knowledge of the world in his effort to answer those doubts and explain how knowledge is possible."[40] With regard to the use of the *reductio,* it appears that it would not be successful in establishing knowledge either way. If we suppose for the sake of the *reductio* that science does not give us knowledge, then as Stroud suggests,

[37] "He does not think the scientific origins of the epistemologist's doubts lead the sceptic to outright contradiction or self-refutation." (Stroud, 227)
[38] Stroud, 228.
[39] "At first site, Quine appears to be on solid ground. If a sceptic offers a scientific argument which appears to show that science is impossible, our best response is to find a mistake in the scientific argument. All we can do is to show that better scientific theory removes the *appearance* of a scientific *reductio ad absurdum* of science. So, if we respond by correcting the scientific theory which supports the sceptical argument, we respond by doing science." (Hookway, 194)
[40] Stroud, 229.

"nothing we believe about the physical world amounts to knowledge."[41] However, suppose the *reductio* shows us that science does indeed give us knowledge, the knowledge would merely amount to showing us that "we can never tell whether the external world really is the way we perceive it to be."[42] Thus, on this account, we can know nothing about the physical world and our beliefs about that physical world could never amount to what we call knowledge. Stroud's point is that either way the *reductio* goes, we are still left with knowing nothing about the physical world.

Stroud comments that this is not to provide an argument for scepticism, but only to show "whether someone whose sceptical reasoning is understood as falling within this general *reductio* pattern would then be in a position to use part or all of his scientific knowledge of the world to show how knowledge is possible after all."[43] In Stroud's opinion he would not. After arriving at the conclusion of the *reductio,* one could not simply go on to "explain how knowledge is nevertheless possible by appealing to those very beliefs about the physical world that we have just consigned to the realm of what is not known."[44] Therefore, even if sceptical doubts originate in science, this would not guarantee that one could conduct an empirical study of human knowledge correctly.[45] What would one appeal to to suggest that their empirical study was correct?

Given the Quinean proposal, one certainly could not appeal to concepts of normativity, knowledge, or beliefs concerning the external world. One could appeal to some sort of reliablism, whereby one would observe the experimental subject's inputs and torrential outputs with respect their beliefs to see what generates more true

[41] Ibid., 228.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 229.
[44] Ibid.
[45] "The scientific origin of our original question or doubts would therefore do nothing to show that the answer to our question or the resolution of our doubts can be found in an empirical study of human knowledge as an observable phenomenon in the physical world." (Stroud, 229)

beliefs than not. However, the difficulty with this position is that the notion of truth entails that we know something about the world. For Quine this is not possible. The human subject merely 'posits' bodies and 'projects' theories with regard to this external world of 'meager' sense data. He states:

> We are studying how the human subject of our study posits bodies and projects his physics from his data, and we appreciate that our position in the world is just like his. Our very epistemological enterprise, therefore, and the psychology wherein it is a component chapter, and the whole of natural science wherein psychology is a component book – all this is our own construction or projection from stimulations like those we were meting out to our epistemological subject. (EN, 83)

This entails that our beliefs about the external physical world go beyond what the senses provide us. Not only does this indicate that the experimental human subject is restricted to 'meager' sense data, it follows that each one of us are in the same predicament. This becomes a further difficulty for Quine, to explain how it is possible to form true beliefs concerning the knowledge of our human subject when we ourselves are restricted the same 'meager' sense data that he is.

Hume argued, like Quine, that we are restricted only to sense impressions given by experience and united by instinctive principles of association. However, because of this, we are denied access to any demonstrable knowledge of objective reality. Hume further argued that within this sense experience, there are a diversity of sense impressions which remain unconnected (what Kant called the 'manifold of representations'). However, if we take Hume seriously and suppose that we are merely bombarded with unconnected sense impressions, we would have to conclude that we have no justification for our supposed knowledge. This suggests that we do not have any justification for our claims concerning the external world and how we believe it to be. In fact, taking Hume's argument to its logical conclusion we would have to admit we do not even have knowledge that it is true we are restricted only to

our sensations or that the diversity of sense impressions remain unconnected. Quine's position is not far off from Hume's own. And as we saw Fogelin state earlier, maybe this is because Quine is really an unapologetic Humean.

Since Quine's naturalized epistemology asserts that all our beliefs about the world are 'posits' that go beyond the 'meager' sense data, this leaves him in no position to say that we know anything about the world. Therefore, there is no way to tell whether the experimental subject's beliefs are correct or false.[46] Nor is it possible, given the Quinean proposal, to tell how the subject came to have those supposed true beliefs. It is granted that Quine's epistemological project does propose to offer a scientific study into the knowledge of the human subject; however, it is not clear how it is possible for him to explain the subject's knowledge in the right way. Moreover, if one is incapable of telling whether the subject's beliefs amount to knowledge in any way, it follow that this is clearly not a good starting place for scientific research into the knowledge of a human subject.[47]

We have seen Stroud discus the significance of skepticism with regard to Quine's epistemological project. Stroud's discussion was not to provide arguments for skepticism itself, but to show how Quine's own proposal was inconsistent and incapable of being carried out under the banner of epistemology. This was demonstrated in several ways.

First, it was shown that there were difficulties with Quine's "underdetermination of a theory of data" thesis. The difficulty being this: given a plurality of competing theories, all of which fit the available evidence, it is not possible to show how any of the theories explain how we know there are external

[46] "To explain how his knowledge or true belief is possible I must know what his beliefs are, and I must know what is the case in the world they are about." (Stroud, 241)
[47] Ibid., 239.

objects, nor does it provide evidence for why we should think that the physical theory is a correct theory regarding the external world?

The second difficulty was found in Quine's belief that 'skeptical doubts are scientific doubts' and that the epistemologist is 'clearly free' to use whatever is available in science to answer them. It was shown, even granting the skeptic the use of the *reductio,* that knowledge about the physical world is not possible on Quine's hypothesis. Moreover, it was pointed out that we couldn't simply proceed, after using such a *reductio,* to explain how knowledge is nevertheless possible by appealing to those very beliefs about the physical world that the *reductio* had shown to be in the realm of what is not known. Therefore, even if skeptical doubts originate in science, this would not guarantee that one could conduct an empirical study of human knowledge correctly.

The third difficulty that was addressed was Quine's assertion that all beliefs are merely 'posits' or 'projections' that go beyond 'meager' sense data. As we saw, this implies that we do not know how the world around us actually is. It was argued that the type of project Quine envisions can only be carried out if one is able to explain the subject's knowledge in the correct way. And this can only be possible if one knows that the world around him is the way he says it is and "that its being that way is partly responsible for his saying or believing it to be that way."[48] However, as we have seen, this in not possible in Quine's naturalized epistemology. This makes Quine's project look completely unsuccessful, since what interested Quine was to see how human knowledge was possible through observing sensory impacts on the human subject and relating them his torrential output. Another difficulty is the very idea that we are impacted with sensory stimulations at our sensory surfaces, because this

[48] Ibid., 238

remains unknown to us as well. Stroud goes so far as to argue that even the belief that one has sensory surfaces "are themselves beliefs" concerning the "external physical world."[49] Therefore, even the existence of our sensory surfaces, that which Quine takes so easily for granted, also belongs to the realm of what is not known.

Conclusion

In concluding, we find Quine posed with many difficulties with regard to his naturalized epistemology project. Since Quine has thrown out the idea of justificatory epistemology, and with it the concept of normativity, we find him in no position to claim that his project is concerned with human knowledge at all. Moreover, it is not even clear how Quine's idea of epistemology could be contained in natural science as a 'chapter of psychology,' since all beliefs are projections, entailing that we can know nothing about the external world, inputs and torrential outputs, or whether there are in fact sensory surfaces. Furthermore, Stroud points out, "If I am to see that 'discovery' too as nothing more than a 'projection' from my 'data', what attitude do I now take to the very problem a naturalized epistemology is supposed to answer?"[50] With all that has been considered, it appears that the naturalized epistemology project, as Quine envisions it, can answer nothing. At the very least, it is a project that cannot account for normativity, and therefore, does not deserve the right to be called epistemology.

[49] Ibid., 245.
[50] Ibid., 246

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